

The Arian Controversy

191

capable of infecting others with the enthusiasm which he felt himself, Arius has *been* described for us mainly by his enemies who considered him a very anti-Christ, and attributed his remarkable success to the direct help of the Evil One. We may be sure that, like all the great religion-; leaders of the world, — union** whom, heretic though he was, he deserves a place, --he was fanatically sincere and the doctrine which he preached was vital and fecund, even though the vitality and fecundity were those of error.

It was not, apparently, until the year 319 that serious disturbance began in the Christian circles of Alexandria. There would first of all be whispers that Arius was preaching strange doctrine and handling its mysteries somewhat boldly and dogmatically. Many would doubt the wisdom of such outspokenness quite apart from the question whether the doctrine taught was sound; others would exhibit the ordinary distrust of innovation; others would welcome the new kindling of theological interest from the inert: pleasure of debate and controversy. We do not suppose that any one, not even Arius himself, foresaw — at any rate, at first..... the extraordinary and lamentable consequences that were to follow from his teaching. The Patriarch Alexander has been blamed for not crushing the infant heresy at its birth, for not stopping the mouth of Arius before the mischief was done. It is easy to

be wine
after the event, doubtless Alexander did
not ap
preciate the danger; possibly also he
thought that
if he waited, the movement would subside
of itself*
lie may very well have believed that this
popular